R E P O R T R E S U M E S

ED 012 948 CG 000 716

THE DIRECTIVE LESS-DIRECTIVE DICHOTOMY AS VIEWED FROM THE CONCEPT OF LINGUISTIC RELATIVITY.

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PUB DATE 66

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.25 HC-$0.72 18P.

DESCRIPTORS- *COUNSELING, *NONDIRECTIVE COUNSELING, *SOCIOLINGUISTICS, *COUNSELING THEORIES, LINGUISTICS, COUNSELORS, COUNSELING GOALS, VOCABULARY, PERCEPTION, ENVIRONMENTAL INFLUENCES, JOURNAL ARTICLES, CARL ROGERS THEORY, WHARFS LINGUISTIC THEORY, DURHAM

DIRECTIVE AND LESS-DIRECTIVE COUNSELING ARE EXAMINED ON A THEORETICAL BASIS THROUGH THE CONCEPT OF LINGUISTIC RELATIVITY (LR). THE FOLLOWING ARE ASSUMED--(1) THE GOAL OF COUNSELING IN OUR SOCIETY IS INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM AND EMERGENCE, (2) DIRECTIVE COUNSELING; AN END IN ITSELF, GUIDES THE CLIENT TO PREDETERMINED ADJUSTMENT, AND (3) LESS-DIRECTIVE COUNSELING PRESERVES THE SOVEREIGNTY OF THE CLIENT BECAUSE ANSWERS CAN ONLY BE KNOWN BY THE CLIENT. LR IS CONCERNED WITH THE WAY LANGUAGES, PARTICULARLY VOCABULARIES, ARE INFLUENCED BY THE PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT. SIMILARLY, PERCEPTION IS AFFECTED BY MENTAL SET. IT IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR PEOPLE TO THINK AND PERCEIVE BEYOND THE BOUNDS OF THEIR LANGUAGE. CONSEQUENTLY, PEOPLE WHO LIVE IN DIFFERENT CULTURES SEE THE WORLD IN DIFFERENT WAYS. BY ANALOGY, INDIVIDUAL VERBALIZATIONS ARE SUBJECT TO A LAW OF INDIVIDUAL, LINGUISTIC RELATIVITY, DIFFERING ONLY IN DEGREE FROM CULTURAL LINGUISTIC RELATIVITY. DOUBT IS THUS CAST ON THE ABILITY OF THE DIRECTIVE COUNSELOR TO CLEARLY UNDERSTAND AND PROVIDE SOLUTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL PROBLEMS. IN CONTRAST, LR AND LESS-DIRECTIVE COUNSELING ARE IN HARMONY BECAUSE THE COUNSELOR MERELY ACTS AS A CATALYST IN A PROCESS INTENDED TO ALLOW THE CLIENT TO UNDERSTAND HIS RELATIONSHIP TO LIFE. THIS ARTICLE IS PUBLISHED IN "PERSPECTIVES ON COUNSELING," VOLUME 1, NUMBER 1, SPRING 1966, AN OCCASIONAL JOURNAL PUBLISHED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW HAMPSHIRE GRADUATE SCHOOL. (PR)

ED012948

PERSPECTIVES

ON

COUNSELING

An occasional journal devoted to the exposition of some of the significant writings of graduate students involved in the

Counselor Education Program
Department of Education
Graduate School
University of New Hampshire
Durham, New Hampshire

CG 000 716

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FOREWORD

There exists a tendency to value only the writings of established experts as having relevance and meaning in our professional world. This is unfortunate, since the person involved in the educational process of becoming a counselor often possesses a refreshing perspective on some of the fundamental issues surrounding the art and science of counseling.

It is the purpose of this occasional journal to share and give exposition to some of these significant writings so that their value will not be lost in the musty files of the ivory tower.

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THE DIRECTIVE LESS-DIRECTIVE DICHOTOMY AS VIEWED FROM THE CONCEPT OF LINGUISTIC RELATIVITY

by
John W. McCarthy

The Directive Less-directive Dichotomy

Culture often defines the counseling relationship. In all cultures, counseling can be put under the general heading of a helping communication between two people. The goals of this helping communication will be related to the culture in which the relationship is operating, but the universal purpose of helping the other is the same. In one culture the goal of counseling may be outright exploitation (propaganda and mind control), while in another culture the goal of counseling may be a genuine effort to promote individual freedom. In our society, individual freedom and emergence are the acknowledged goals of all helping communications. This fundamental concept of democracy remained for many years as a sacred cow until, within the past twenty-five years, some voices have been raised as to the source of individual freedom and happiness. The question now remains as to whether counseling goals are a function of a knower who directs the helping communication (the counselor), or by an unknower in the communication (the client).

This issue is best understood in terms of the interpersonal communication of the counseling relationship. The counseling relationship is acknowledged to be a vehicle for behavioral change. All counselors use the relationship to set up mutual expectations which both the client and the counselor believe will lead toward personal

emergence. The interpersonal communication which takes place in the relationship is a function of the counselor's concept of what the relationship is, i.e., the theoretical orientations of this era have forced the following issue: is the direction of behavioral change a function of the counselor or the client? On this point, it is possible to divide the relationship into two schools of thought. It is important to remember that each of these schools of thought have as their goal individual freedom and emergence, the "American ideal."

The Two Schools of Counseling.

A. Directive: This approach to counseling is personified, by those who tend to be analytic in their approach to clients. They view the relationship as an end in itself which guides the client to a predetermined adjustment. The client sees the relationship as a tool which allows the counselor to guide him to goodness. The crux of this relationship is the power of the counselor to understand and direct a client within a construct of a priori truth about the nature of all personality problems and their solutions. Frank describes this relationship when he writes, "The interpretation of all the patient's thoughts, feelings, and acts in terms of a consistent and unshakable framework."[1] All communication in the relationship is between the client who explains his problems and the counselor who diagnoses and treats these problems of which he possesses clinical knowledge. If the clinician is to treat problems by directing the client toward better forms of adjustment, this treatment must necessarily involve a giver of true moral and ethical judgments to people who lack the ability to find them unaided.

B. Less-directive: In this type of relationship the sovereignty of the client as the knower and criterion of freedom and happiness is stressed. The relationship is not viewed as a means of imparting knowledge from a knower to an unknower, but as a means of allowing an unknower to learn about and help himself. The personification of this type of relationship is the Client-Centered Viewpoint of Carl R. Rogers. In all of Rogers' writings there are references to such concepts as warmth, unconditional positive regard, empathy, and acceptance; while concepts such as knowing, directing, shaping, etc., are not to be found. The counselor is seen as one who helps without knowing the answers because the answers can only be known by the client. Rogers writes "I have found that my total organismic sensing of a situation is more trustworthy than my intellect."[2] The intellect is what can know facts; sensing is a weak word on the continuum of knowledge which suggests an attempt at understanding and a realization that facts are relative to the individual.

Both directive and less-directive counseling have been involved in much criticism. Many of these criticisms have been fruitless because a valid criticism must focus on the theoretical foundations of each helping relationship rather than upon the working relationship itself. The operant conditioning criticism of directive therapy is invalid in the light of a school of thought based on the ability of the counselor to guide a client toward his criterion of adjustment. The "need for guidance" criticism of less-directive counseling is invalid in the light of a school of thought which stresses the capacity of the individual to provide his own guidance.

Valid criticisms focus on counseling as a theory, not as a method of helping people. Theories are not facts, and it is fruitless to criticize something which, because it is only a supposition, cannot be ridiculed into rightness or wrongness. Although a theory cannot be proved right or wrong, it can be judged in the light of its innate characteristics. Hall and Lindsey write the following about the essence of a theory, "A second function which a theory must serve is that of permitting the incorporation of known empirical findings within a logically consistent and reasonably simple framework."[3] It logically follows that an adequate theory of counseling must embrace, in a consistent manner, any data concerning the limits and nature of interpersonal communication.

In this paper the theory of Linguistic Relativity is offered as a concept of interpersonal communication which may be used as one means of evaluating the directive less-directive dichotomy. It is hoped that this one approach to evaluating these two approaches to counseling will not yield answers, but will serve in the process of developing more adequate ways of helping people. Conant sums this up when he writes, "It would be more accurate to call theories policies, to denote their tentative relationship to an ongoing process of inquiry."[4]

The Concept of Linguistic Relativity

A. The Nature of Language.

Ordinarily, language is taken for granted. Its fluent and easy use leads to the incorrect assumption that it is an unencumbered medium for the transmission of thought. Because language

offers no apparent obstacle in our customary flow of ideas, one assumes that it is a vehicle equally fitted to convey beliefs or attitutes to any people at any time.

In the lives of all people there are a multitude of background phenomena which are completely unconscious. If a rule has no exceptions, it is not recognized as a rule or anything else, for it is a part of our background of experience. Never having experienced anything to contrast a rule, we cannot isolate it and formulate it until we so enlarge our experience and expand our base of reference that we encounter an interruption of its regularity.

Language is a background phenomena which has been uncovered by researchers. This discovery had to wait until man's sophistication allowed him to study his person with the same objectivity with which he has studied inorganic phenomena. Whorf, in Language, Thought, and Reality, points out that before man could study the effects of language on his thinking he had to discover at least the following two fallacies of his natural logic.

> 1. Natural logic assumes that the phenomena of a language are a part of the critical consciousness and control of the thinker. The individual often fails to realize that he is marching in step with purely grammatical facts that have a background character in his own language or family of languages; but are by no means a universal in all languages.
>
> 2. Natural logic confuses agreement about subject matter, attained through language, with the knowledge of the linguistic process through which agreement is attained. For example, A gives orders to B and B carries out A's orders to A's complete satisfaction. Often A and B as natural logicians presume that they understand the mental process of association which allows them to communicate. The complex patterns of the linguistic classifications of A and B are almost completely background to A and B. Even though A and B agree on the definition of X, the matrix of association which A and B have for X may be very different.

Whorf touches upon both these fallacies of natural logic when he writes "Talking, or the use of language, is supposed only to express what is essentially already formulated nonintellectually. This mental formulation called thought or thinking, is supposed to be largely indifferent to the nature of particular languages."[5]

B. Language and Environment.

Languages differ in their respective vocabularies, and these differences are correlated with differences in environment. Whorf noticed that the Eskimo language has a variety of words for the different kinds of snow, where we have only one word for falling snow, snow on the ground, snow packed like ice, etc. For the Eskimo, this all inclusive word would be almost unthinkable, because different types of snow are different critical things with which to contend.

Man is governed by a hierarchy of needs, the most basic of which is survival. Man's culture is a unified system of guidance which is fundamental for survival. Man's environment is one of the elements which often threatens his survival and thus puts limitations and demands over the form of his culture. A primary aspect of this culture is language. The vocabulary of a language clearly reflects the physical and social environment of a people. A language is a complex inventory of all the ideas, interests, and occupations of the community which allows the individual to relate to his environment. Thus, a complex lexicon of berries is found along desert people who must depend on this type of food for their survival, and a language which permits a detached description of topographical features is necessary in a country where complex directions may be required for the location of water holes.

C. Language and Perception.

The theory of linguistic Relativity not only points out the background character of language and the influence of environment on language, but more importantly the effect of language on man's perception of the world. Language would have little to do with perception if perception were merely a matter of recording what is presented. This is not the case, however, and there is abundant evidence to show that perception is influenced by mental set. Set is a mental state of readiness, governed by the individual's system of linguistic and nonlinguistic references, to perceive or respond in a certain way.

The world is a kaleidoscopic flux of impressions which have to be organized and classified by our minds and processed through the human organism. With the strong influence of our linguistic system (a background phenomena shaped by the survival demands of our environment), we organize nature into concepts. Thus, every individual in a society has an implicit and unstated bond with his culture to organize and classify data within certain learned boundaries. No individual is free to describe nature with absolute impartiality because he is constrained to certain modes of perception. Thus the principle of Linguistic Relativity "holds that all observers are not lead by the same physical evidence to the same picture of the universe, unless their linguistic backgrounds are similar, or can in some way be calibrated."[6] From this, Whorf has maintained that language consists of a sort of logic or a general frame of reference, and molds the thought and perceptions of its habitual users.

D. Development.

Whorf made a comparison of American Indian languages, notably Hopi, with European languages. Among the latter, he found the differences so insignificant in comparison to the differences from Hopi that he grouped them all together under the general title of S. A. E. (Standard Average European). Among the European languages there is a unanimity of major patterns which at first seem to bear out natural logic. But, this unanimity exists only because these tongues are all Indo-European dialects cut to the same plan, and being historically transmitted from what was one speech community. Even the unanimity found in the S.A.E. language group can be questioned under close analysis. It is easier to see the full force of the relativity of language between the S.A.E. and a language like Hopi, but the subtle relativity in the S.A.E. language group, within the same speech community, can also be illustrated.

In summary, the concept of Linguistic Relativity indicates that people who live in different environments, have different symbolic representations of these environments, and see the world in different ways. It is impossible for people to think and perceive beyond the bounds of their language. A perceptive semanticist, Elton Carter, wrote on this point, "Did you know that in all our talking, we are in a sense talking about ourselves, no matter what else we might believe we are talking about?"[7]

The Directive Less-directive Dichotomy Viewed from the Concept of Linguistic Relativity.

The concept of Linguistic Relativity indicates that people who live in different cultures see the world in different ways. The associations evoked by a story told by one individual in one cul-

ture may be far different from the mental images the story teller is representing in another culture. It is the contention of this paper that individual verbalizations are subject to a law of individual linguistic relativity, differing only in a matter of degree from cultural linguistic relativity. Different environments in various cultures produce different verbalizations of the world, and as a result of these verbalizations produce different ways of perceiving and thinking about the world. Differences in individual environments also produce individual verbalizations and individual ways of thinking about and perceiving the world.

It is obvious that people are different from each other and have been brought up in different environments:

> "It is impossible to hold the environment of two human beings strictly constant. We might hold the environment constant geographically and in almost every physical sense, even to the extent of having the same parents, the same house, and the same school, and the same teachers. But its effective constancy could still not be guaranteed."[8]

The theory of linguistic relativity indicates that these different environments amount to an individual world for every person. One experiment by Bruner and Goodman[9] dealing with social status and perceptive judgments, will serve to illustrate this point. Bruner and Goodman took one group of children from a lower class settlement house; a second group was composed of ten children from a wealthy progressive school. It was assumed that the lower-class children differed from the others in their need for money. For them coins should have more value and hence, according to the hypothesis of the experiment, seem larger than to the wealthy children. The results of the judgments made can be summarized as follows. First, the poor children over-estimated the size of the coins more

than did the wealthy children. Second, except for the half dollar, the amount of overestimation tended to increase as the monitary value of the coin increased. This paper hypothesizes that the coins seemed larger because of the relative linguistic value they held for the children. The size of the coins was perceived according to the symbolic associations they had in the individual worlds of each subject.

Linguistic Relativity is well established on a cross-cultural basis. If one accepts the concept of individual linguistic relativity, it offers a method of evaluating the relative merits of directive and less-directive counseling on an analysis of theory basis.

Linguistic Relativity and A Directive Approach to Counseling

If every person sees the world in subtly different ways and expresses his world in a common language which has individual associations for him, it casts doubt on the ability of the directive counselor to really understand and provide correct solutions for individual problems which, according to his theoretical foundations, he must actually know. A common culture and similar environment guarantees people a general understanding of each other, but never an exact understanding. The concept of Linguistic Relativity negates such a statement as, "Thus it will often come about that patient and analyst find themselves having the same associations."[10] This criticism of directive counseling theory is represented clearly in the following statement by Gilbert Wrenn: "Lindgren extends semantics to represent a philosophy of human relations. A counselor using general semantics will respect the integrity

of the inner meaning of facts, a meaning that is unique to each individual. He will see the individual as the only reality, not as a group or a class of individuals."[11]

Linguistic Relativity and A Less-directive Approach to Counseling

The philosophical and methodological approach of less-directive counseling is in harmony with the concept of Linguistic Relativity. The client-centered counselor is not a knower and giver of truth but rather an unknower who through his intellectual and empathetic human skills acts as a catalyst in a process intended to allow the client to understand his relationship to life, and to answer his own questions about his problems. Rogers illustrates this when he writes, "We have tended to give up the description of the counselor's role as being that of clarifying the client's attitudes."[12] To clarify means to understand, and understanding is the personal dominion of the individual.

General Summary

The concept of Linguistic Relativity offers one approach to the analysis and development of counseling theory. In the light of this one approach to theory analysis, the concept of directive counseling is not rejected, but the theoretical basis for this control is questioned. From the writer's view, the decision to control is no more of a value judgment than the decision not to control. Viewed from the concept of Linguistic Relativity, the theoretical basis of a directive approach to counseling must be sharply challenged.

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